

VZCZCXYZ0001  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSG #0451/01 1322011  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 122011Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4933  
INFO RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 1491  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 6180  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY BRASILIA 0905  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4402  
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 3972  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2094  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SANTIAGO 000451

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MASS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [CI](#)

SUBJECT: CHILEAN MILITARY LOOKS TOWARD THE FUTURE

¶1. Summary: Anxious to maintain its reputation as the most professional military in the region, the Chilean armed forces engage in continual modernization. Current initiatives include investing in more efficient technologies and training programs, closing loopholes in the pension system, creating space for merit-based promotion, and expanding interaction with the global community. As part of the modernization process, the Chilean military also aims to generate better understanding among citizens about the important role of the armed forces. End Summary.

#### Modernization of the Military Career

-----

¶2. EPOL officers attended a recent seminar, "The Defense of Chile Approaching its Bicentennial Anniversary," at which experts on Chilean defense issues discussed their vision for the armed forces today. A theme common to each presenter was modernization, with a particular emphasis on revitalizing the military career. The Chilean government took an important step toward modernizing its armed forces in July 2008 when it passed the Professional Soldiers Law, creating an all-voluntary military service. Military personnel serving in one-year terms can now apply for professional enlisted soldier status through renewable five-year contracts. Longer-term military service will protect the investment in personnel who operate Chile's technologically-advanced military equipment.

¶3. Building on the Professional Soldiers Law, military leaders hope to make strides in training and career development. Specifically, there are plans to make a substantial investment in innovative new technology. These modernization efforts-- technological advancements and better training programs--are expected to increase efficiency among members of the armed services.

¶4. In an effort to explain the challenges inherent in today's military career, academic and former defense staffer Guillermo Pattillo highlighted the rigid structure of military entry and advancement. Seeking employment in the armed forces assumes a long-term commitment beginning at the entry-level, which may act as a deterrent to potential mid-career recruits. In addition,

promotions are more a reflection of the length of time spent in military service than on individual merit. Pattillo suggested introducing opportunities to join the military mid-career and to allow for career path flexibility.

¶5. The current pension system is another obstacle in the quest for a modernized military career structure. Eliminating costly loopholes is a priority. Too many people abuse the pension claim system, increasing costs to the Armed Services.

Defending Chile's Military Budget

-----

¶16. In tones that were sometimes defensive, several of the presenters tackled the controversial issue of Chile's military budget. Largely because of a contentious law that ties expenditures on military equipment to yearly copper revenues, the military budget is a source of dissonance between some civilians and the armed forces. The potential reform of Chile's Copper Law--which earmarks 10 percent of earnings generated by the state-owned copper company for the purchase of defense equipment--is a perpetual topic of debate. Several conservative commentators defended the Copper Law's role in keeping Chile safe, and expressed concern over changing the law at any time in the near future.

¶17. Guillermo Pattillo assured the audience that only a very small percentage (1.2%) of Chile's GDP is dedicated to military spending. (Note: Pattillo clarified later that his statistic is much lower than other figures because he does not include pensions. End Note.)

Addressing the lack of understanding among citizens about the importance of military spending, staunchly conservative parliamentarian Maria Angelica Cristi (UDI) pointed out that "the cost of arms is the cost of peace." She also noted that Chile's education and health budget is four times larger than its defense budget.

¶18. Responding to social criticism of Chile's military expenditures, several presenters highlighted the fact that the national security defended by the armed forces actually increases productivity and enhances overall well being. They also emphasized the need to increase communication between civilians and the military to mitigate the dissatisfaction expressed by many Chileans over the military budget.

¶19. Responding to calls for more transparent defense spending, legislator Maria Angelica Cristi asserted that the details of military purchases must remain classified to protect national security. Despite recent surveys suggesting that Chileans profoundly value the military, many conservative speakers showed a strong desire to cultivate a clearer understanding among citizens of the crucial role of a well-funded military.

#### Chile's Integration into the Globalized World

-----

¶10. Chile is working to build a military that is stronger, faster, and more modern. A new law deals specifically with Chilean participation in peacekeeping operations, and requires congressional approval for participation in such operations. Congressional approval can be given for periods of one year, multiple years, or permission for the lifetime of the peacekeeping mission. Chilean forces are currently deployed in a peacekeeping mission in Haiti, and although there has been some disappointment with the Haitian government's reception of the troops, the mission itself demonstrates Chile's commitment to international engagement.

¶11. Another example of this commitment is Chile's positive interaction with bordering countries. Despite historic conflicts with Argentina and Bolivia, Chile now participates in joint military exercises with both countries. The Cruz del Sur peacekeeping force is comprised of both Chilean and Argentine troops, and its creation in 2008 highlighted the increasing political and economic integration between the countries. Chile and Bolivia have just recently started joint exercises, focusing on building a capacity to work together to respond to natural disasters that may occur in either country.

¶12. Because southern Chile is so close to Antarctica, the development of a modernized base there is a matter of national pride. The military's desire to build a new facility in Antarctica is also aimed at creating a stronger claim for Chile on the continent.

#### Armed Forces' Social Responsibility

-----

¶13. Chile's commitment to social responsibility complements the

military's increasing role in the global community. The Defense Minister of Chile created a military social responsibility policy that is intended to advance the country's environmental and economic sustainability. This includes military participation in a wide variety of projects designed to build understanding and help those in need, including through blood drives, neighborhood clean-ups, distribution of food and medicine, and other humanitarian undertakings.

SIMONS